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SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE APPLAUDS GATES' WITHDRAWAL
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FILE ONLY

The Senate Intelligence Committee today applauded Robert Gates for withdrawing his nomination to head the CIA, citing the need to appoint someone unconnected to the Iran arms scandal.

"We commend Mr. Gates for putting the interests of the country and the agency ahead of his own personal interests by standing aside so that a permanent director could be put in place more quickly," chairman Sen. David Boren said in a statement he read to reporters on behalf of himself and vice-chairman Sen. William Cohen. P

But Boren and Cohen declined to speculate on who might be nominated in his place. Cohen said he understood the administration was seeking "primarily an outsider ... not within the agency."

Senate opponents of Gates' nomination threatened to delay a vote on his confirmation until after congressional committees investigating the sale of U.S. arms to Iran and diversion of profits to U.S.-backed Nicaraguan rebels completed their work.

"It would not be good for the country to leave a critical department like the CIA adrift with only an acting director for a prolonged period of time," Boren said.

Senate Democratic Leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia also commended Gates for withdrawing himself from consideration for the post. "We need a CIA director who will restore credibility to the agency and its operations," he said in a statement.

Boren, an Oklahoma Democrat, and Cohen, a Maine Republican, said the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) needed someone who was completely unconnected to President Reagan's Iran arms scandal, although they stressed that there was no evidence Gates was implicated in any wrongdoing.

"Bob Gates is a capable, experienced professional in the intelligence field who has a good record of public service over the past 20 years," Boren said. "But the important thing is to have a fresh start."

Gates, 43, was appointed CIA deputy director in April 1986 and has been acting director since December after William Casey underwent surgery to remove a cancerous brain tumor.

Reagan nominated Gates last month to replace Casey but, during two days of combative hearings in the Senate intelligence committee earlier this month, questions were raised about Gates' role in the Iran affair.